

The Decline of Parliamentary Government



discussed by

HAROLD J. LASKI

DR. JOSEF REDLICH

March 28, 1931



FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION

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FOR WOMEN

New York Luncheon Discussion

Pamphlet No. 74

Series 1930-31

May, 1931

15c. a copy

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PAMPHLET 74
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

May 1931

FOR THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Printed by the Stationery Office

London

New York: The Macmillan Company

SPEAKERS' TABLE

- MISS VALENTINE L. CHANDOR—*President, New York Branch, The American Association of University Women*
- HARRY ELMER BARNES—*Editorial writer, Scripps-Howard papers; formerly professor of history and sociology, Smith College; author, "World Politics in Modern Civilization," etc.*
- MISS THEODORA BOSANQUET—*Secretary, International Federation of University Women*
- HARRY D. GIDEONSE—*Associate professor of economics, University of Chicago; author, F. P. A. reports on "International Industrial Agreements," and "The Reparation Settlement of 1930"*
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- GERALD CAMPBELL—*British Consul General in New York*
- PROF. LASKI—*Professor of Political Science, University of London*
- MR. McDONALD—*Chairman*
- DR. REDLICH—*Formerly Minister of Finance, Austria; Professor of Comparative Public Law, Harvard University; Deputy Judge, Permanent Court of International Justice*
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- HERBERT W. SCHNEIDER—*Professor of religion, Department of Philosophy, Columbia University; author, "Making the Fascist State"*

The Decline of Parliamentary Government: Are Dictatorships the Alternative?

MR. JAMES G. McDONALD, Chairman

I WOULD like, first, if I might, say just a word of welcome to the council and officers of the International Federation of University Women, who have come to this country to hold their annual meeting, at the invitation of the American group of University Women. We are pleased to have some thirty or forty members of this delegation here today. They arrived only yesterday.

Today's meeting is on a timely subject, "The Decline of Parliamentary Government: Are Dictatorships the Alternative?" I am not quite sure that either Dr. Redlich or Professor Laski will undertake to give us a definite answer, but I hope that from each of them we will get illuminating and interesting comments on the problem.

The first speaker is Professor Harold J. Laski, who before becoming Professor of Political Science in the University of London, in 1926, taught in this country at Cambridge, Amherst, Harvard, and also at McGill, and since 1920 has been connected with the London School of Economics.

Professor Laski, as most of you know, is the author of a number of interesting, and some of them, provocative books, on political science, such as "The Problem of Sovereignty," "The Authority of the Modern State," "Foundations of Sovereignty," and his latest book, which is just out, on politics.

He is now giving lectures in the different universities—some of the universities in the East—and also a series of lectures on the present and future of British political institutions, at the New School for Social Research here.

In view of his many duties elsewhere in academic centers, we are all the more grateful that Professor Laski has been willing to come to us today. It is a great pleasure to present him. Professor Laski!

PROFESSOR HAROLD J. LASKI

MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: I did not know until Mr. McDonald spoke how far my guilt extended, but the use of that word provocative in relation to only some of my books seemed to me to suggest for the first time a vision in myself of declining powers. I apologize, Mr. Chairman, in advance.

Let me say immediately that I cannot make a direct and forthright answer to the question that is upon the order paper of this afternoon. What I propose to do is something very different. I speak in the presence of the greatest living student of English government, Dr. Josef Redlich, and my business as the introducer of this discussion is to put forward a body of alternatives about which the mind of Dr. Redlich can usefully play.

Mr. Chairman, I want to begin with a quotation from the greatest book ever written about parliamentary government in England—Walter Bagehot's *English Constitution*. I want to adopt it for my purposes, and then to draw some inferences from it.

Walter Bagehot, writing in 1867, makes a member of Parliament say, "For thirty years I wrote novels and nobody ever heard of me. And then I was elected to the House of Commons and people began to discuss the cut of my waistcoat and the way I wore my hair. I became a significant figure." Supposing that Bagehot had written not in 1867, but in 1927, what would Bagehot have said? "For thirty years I was a member of the House of Commons, and no one ever heard of me. And then I wrote a flashy novel, which was taken up in the United States of America, by the Book-of-the-Month Club and immediately people began to discuss the cut of my waistcoat and the way I wore my hair. I became an international figure, discussed wherever the English language is spoken."

Mr. Chairman, what has happened that marks the difference of those sixty years? It was easy for parliamentary government in the nineteenth century to impress itself upon the minds of all those who came into contact with us. It was an impressive thing. It was dealing for the most part with questions, every one of which is capable of solution by discussion—questions of religious emancipation, questions of political franchise, questions like the extension of the university of education, questions like the little more or the little less of freedom of trade and protective tariff; and those with whom the power of the English state rested were broadly agreed about the contours of the English state.

English politics, as Lord Balfour once said, was an organized quarrel, and when men are agreed about the large outlines of that quarrel and consent to discuss only its details, when it is the little more or the little less that is the subject matter of debate, and not the outermost contours of

social life itself, then, relatively speaking, the success of parliamentary government is simple. When men know what effectively they want, and when they are agreed upon the kind of life that they propose to live, government by a body like the House of Commons, or like the Chamber of Deputies, or any other legislative assembly, does not present the major problems.

The issues, Mr. Chairman, begin to arise when men are not so agreed; when, if I may make the antithesis, they move from the discussions of problems of liberty, over to the discussions of problems of equality. Because when it is problems of equality that are discussed, immediately and inevitably matters of property and the rights of property come into view; and the situation that parliamentary government confronts today is a situation different in kind from the situation in the nineteenth century. What is it trying to do at the present time? It is trying to solve the problems of a twentieth century state with an instrument that was devised for solving the problems of a nineteenth century state. In England or France or Germany, wherever the classic forms are utilized, it is trying, as I think, upon a scale that makes the matter of increasing difficulty, to do three things.

It is trying, in the first place, to transfer economic power from one class in the state to another class in the state, where an agreement about the substance of economic power is by no means common to the different classes of the community. Liberals and Conservatives in Great Britain could, during the course of the last hundred years, agree without difficulty. They were members, and for the most part, of the same social classes. They wanted, for the most part, the same things. But there is no ultimate basis of final agreement between the Socialist party in Great Britain and the Conservative party in Great Britain.

The Conservative party wants, on the whole, to preserve the outlines of the *status quo*, and the Socialist party wants a commonwealth in which there is equal share in the gain as well as in the toil of living; and the cost of establishing that equal share must be paid for by those who have inherited in the past the dominant control of power.

Now, as has been said in Number Ten of "The Federalist," the only durable source of faction is property, and when men begin to dispute about the rights of property, passions enter in the very foundations of the debate, different from the passions that arise upon any other thing. And the simplicity, Mr. Chairman, of majority rule and government by distortion begins always to disappear when men's passions are vitally engaged. You saw in England, during the struggle over home rule, as soon as men had come to ultimate problems that parliamentary government seemed incapable of making a final answer because of the vehemence of passions that were engaged.

As a country, we are asking the dominant class of the past voluntarily to abdicate from the position of authority it has previously exercised. I know no class, Mr. Chairman, in history that has voluntarily abdicated from power, voluntarily abdicated because the force of argument as displayed upon the floor of the House of Commons, has convinced those to whom the argument is addressed, that it is unjust or unwise or impracticable that they shall continue to retain power. And yet upon that foundation the notion of the House of Commons or the Chamber of Deputies, or the Reichstag as organized now, can satisfy the wants of this new democracy in whose hands full political power rests. That seems to me a notion too simple to commend itself to observers in a Europe organized like the Europe of the present time.

Take the House of Commons, which of course I know best, and upon which, therefore, I can speak with a little more confidence. The House of Commons is overwhelmed by the flow of business. No matter comes before it at the present time that is seriously discussed in all its essential principles. The House of Commons has been transformed into an organ of registration for the cabinet, and the will of that cabinet, where it commands a majority in the House of Commons, flows directly to its appointed goal.

The member of Parliament can ask questions which the Minister will or will not answer, as he thinks fit. The member of Parliament can bring in a private measure, knowing that he will never carry it to the statute book. The private member may, if he so desires, raise a question at eight-fifteen, during those Wednesdays of the sessions not otherwise occupied by government business, if he wins a place in the ballot, which is extraordinarily unlikely, and he can have it debated with the full knowledge that nothing will happen as a consequence of the debate.

The House of Commons has become an interesting and attractive assembly from the angle of enabling the private member to satisfy his constituents that he is an eloquent person; an admirable assembly from the angle, and it is an important angle, of testing the character of Ministers, and upon occasion finding that character good. The selective function of the House of Commons does, at any rate, give its Ministers who have been tried and tested in the fire of discussion, an opportunity; and that is an advantage that I, for one, would not underestimate. But the notion that the people as a whole can make its will prevail through the engines of parliamentary government, no man can seriously plead in England or France or Germany at the present time. There are invisible empires outside, and it is in those invisible empires that the real rulers of society are to be discovered.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I don't want my own position for one moment to be misunderstood. I am a convinced believer in democratic government, and, unfashionable as it may be, the more I read of the critics on demo-

cratic government, the clearer is the case for democracy, to my humble mind. I should say at once that I don't know any case for democratic government that can't have the bottom knocked out of it in ten minutes; but I know no alternative that will stand five minutes cross examination.

Mr. Chairman, believing, therefore, in democratic government, I believe that it is of vital importance that it should discover its appropriate institutions, and the classic institutions of the nineteenth century are upon a grave and solid experience, now too slow, too cumbersome, too inadequate in general to meet the problems they must, whether they will or no, seek to solve.

I do not believe that the replacement of democratic government by dictatorships, whether dictatorships like that of Moscow, or merely contemptible dictatorships like that of Rome, have got anything of substantial value to contribute to the technique of solving problems, because the business of government is the maximum satisfaction of public demand.

The thesis of dictatorship is the refusal to consider any demand save that which is satisfactory to the dictator, and if you are prepared, as in America, of course, you are not always prepared to consider things over a period instead of at intervals of six months in order to pronounce judgments upon them, it is, I think, clear that the natural history of dictatorships is that by this oppression of discussion they leave the second condition worse than the first.

Ultimately you have to consider the will of the people because ultimately force is always on the side of the governed; and because force is on the side of the governed, the satisfaction of the wants of those governed is fundamental. Therefore, to discover their wants and to make those wants move decisively to the center of power, that is a fundamental business.

As I see it, we have a society, Mr. Chairman, in which political power has formally been entrusted to the mass of men and women, but they cannot, because of the disparity between the ownership of economic power and the ownership of political power, make their will decisively felt in the operation of the institutions under parliamentary government.

Effective power in any state belongs to those who own economic power, and the great contours of social life are accordingly dominated by business men. May I say even in the City of New York that I am not a great admirer of business men—that the kind of civilization that they have built, a civilization dominated by the profit-making motive, is a civilization incapable of establishing a régime of justice; that the supposed practical qualities of business men are the most impractical of all qualities, if you want a stable society. The only difference between an academic theorist, like myself, and a business man is that the academic theorist knows that he is acting upon assumptions, and that the practical man is entirely unaware

of the assumptions upon which he is acting with, Mr. Chairman, the inevitable consequence that in the end the academic theorist has to clear up the mess that the business man leaves.

Now, Mr. Chairman, because an adjustment has to be made between political power and economic power, that adjustment can be made in one of two ways. It can be made through parliamentary institutions, or it can be made by extra legal means. My difficulty is that I do not see how the adjustment can be made rapidly enough and efficiently enough in a society such as ours through a parliamentary institution that has never considered organization and problems of the kind that we confront.

You cannot clarify economic questions in the kind of debate for which the House of Commons was organized. You cannot arrive at the quantitative solutions that economic problems now demand through the classic forms of parliamentary government. You cannot, particularly, do that in an unequal society, for a reason that perhaps I may best illustrate, not in terms of my government, but in terms of an admirable observation once made by an old New England farmer about Daniel Webster. "Daniel Webster," said the old farmer, "was never the same man once he got his feet under Boston mahogany." And that does affect the minds and temper and hearts of those who govern, even where they are a Labor or a Socialist government, and its consequences result in a separation between the mind and the wants of the rank and file, and the mind and the wants of those who govern in their name. The consequences of that are serious.

We have in England, as I think, the ablest governing class that has ever been known in history, a governing class that has practiced the art of concession more gracefully and more successfully than any other class with which history acquaints us. And because it has so admirably practiced that art we tend to assume in Great Britain that constitutional government is a *chose donnée* about which we can remain certain and convinced. Why do we make, why are we entitled to make those assumptions?

The governing class in England that made its concessions during the nineteenth century never suffered from the concessions that it made. Our industrial and economic supremacy until the eighties of the nineteenth century was so outstanding that whatever was done for the working class by the governing class, or the industrial and land owning class of Great Britain, did not seriously alter the position that they occupied, the kind of life that they were in a position to live. But that industrial and economic supremacy is very largely gone. Why it is gone, and to whom it has gone, those are problems that lie outside the sphere of my discussion this afternoon. But in order to satisfy, Mr. Chairman, the wants of this democracy with political power, that governing class has now to pay a price of which the consequence is inevitably its abdication.

Is it prepared to pay that price? Is it prepared to live a life so different from the life that it led in the past, that life that made the heir to an English dukedom seem the natural groom of the heiress to an American millionaire? With those days gone, when the men without the charm that has characterized English government, men—but I must avoid names, men like some who in the British government today are concerned with those grim, economic problems which level down the power of the past into a new and a broader basis, are they going to make that grand gesture of surrender, and in making it, enable a peaceful solution to follow?

I would, Mr. Chairman, suggest for Dr. Redlich's consideration, three things. I would, in the first place, suggest that as Europe is organized at the present time, with its capitalistic background, in that organization and in that background, inevitably and inherently involved, is war; that war means the creation all over Europe of either communistic dictatorships in alliance with Russia, or Fascist dictatorship in alliance with great business enterprise, which thirty years ago in this country, Jack London admirably called "The Iron Heel"; and that parliamentary government is incompatible with the possibilities that emerge out of the prospect of war.

Or, secondly, I suggest to him a Labor government returning to power about 1937, after five years of Conservative government, say from some such period as June of next year, that Labor government finding the House of Lords reformed by the Conservative party, and reform is one of those adorable euphemisms usually confined to ecclesiastical controversy and, Mr. Chairman, because that House of Lords so reformed will be incapable of being reached by the majority of such a House of Commons, an irresistible force meeting an impenetrable rock, with no method of constitutionally carrying out the will of the government of the day.

And the third thing that I suggest to him for consideration is the endowment at a heavy cost of the social services that we in the Socialist party in Great Britain regard as integral to a well ordered national life, things like, for example, the dole, about which I have heard a deep feeling exists in the United States of America, but the dole of which we in the Socialist party are proud to affirm, we consider the very essence of any well regulated community that has a decent regard for the quality of civic life.

Mr. Chairman, when you begin to consider all that is involved in the taxation that such a system of social services imply, when you deliberately utilize the engines of the state for the mitigation of the consequences of social inequality, are those who are affected by the taxation involved, income tax and super tax and death duties and inheritance duties, the insistence which is what it ultimately amounts to, that no well ordered state can equally weigh the will of its citizens unless there is approximate economic equality in that state, will the governing class so challenged abdicate quietly? It didn't abdicate quietly in the seventeenth century in

England; it didn't abdicate quietly in 1848; and it didn't abdicate quietly in our lifetime, in 1917.

When these grave issues are at stake, when the ultimate question between A and B is what Carlyle called the ultimate question between any two human beings, "Can I kill thee, or canst thou kill me?", is Parliament likely to be content to debate a solution across the floor of the House of Commons; and when the government whip goes to the right side of the speaker and announces that the act has been carried, will they be prepared without difficulty, without even repining, to legislate the Socialist Utopia into existence? May I venture to express my doubts? May I say, without one moment's hesitation, that in my judgment, constitutional government offers prospects of good to modern society that are unequalled by any alternative, that the weapons that are now at the disposal of violence are so disastrous in their impact that if they are utilized, civilization may easily become a legend.

But because rationality demands constitutionalism, that seems to me no reason to suppose that constitutionalism will follow. Man is, not even in the United States of America, an entirely rational creature; and because he isn't an entirely rational creature, the danger that passion may be involved, that men may think the price of peace a price that is not worth paying, is something that one must confront.

One hundred years ago, on the eve of the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832, Macaulay used some words in the House of Commons that I venture once again to recommend to the consideration of persons interested in these matters. "Reform," said Macaulay, "if you would preserve, is the watchword of great events."

We live, in western Europe, under a parliamentary system devised for different purposes, suitable to different ends—a machine inadequately articulated with the problems that it has to solve, hardly related to thorough-going reconstruction in terms, above all, of a continuous approach to economic equality. That is the watchword of the present time, a watchword intensified by the revolution in Russia, which stands to our generation in the same way as the French Revolution to the early nineteenth century, in the same way as the Reformation to the sixteenth century, one of the cardinal events, however much we may dislike it, in the history of mankind.

We have, therefore, in Europe to bend our minds to fundamental reconstruction. In so bending our minds we have to remember the price of failing to go back to the foundations of the state. We have to remember that a failure to go back means, as I suggest, either dictatorship to the right or dictatorship to the left, either of which, to me, is wholly evil in the consequences that it portends. I, therefore, venture to predict that the road before us is a long road and a difficult road, about which any kind of certain

prophecy has no justification. But it is in the chance to rebuild this world a little nearer to the heart's desire, to recognize, as I recognize, that with good will, with determination, with inventiveness, with creative thought, there is a prospect of drawing back at the very edge of the abyss, of finding the highroad to a better day, there is that chance with all its difficulty. It is because that chance exists, and of the vision that it opens to us that I find the supreme worth of the European adventure.

THE CHAIRMAN: The second speaker to whom Mr. Laski referred in such eloquent but wholly justifiable terms, and to whom Mr. Laski assigned the modest task of answering his series of simple and elementary questions, it is now my pleasure to introduce. It is a particular pleasure because I have had the honor of knowing Professor Redlich for many years, and the privilege of thinking of him as one of my very close friends.

He was Minister of Finance in the Imperial Cabinet of Emperor Charles in the Austria-Hungarian Empire; formerly Professor of Constitutional Law in the University of Vienna; he is now Professor of Comparative Public Law in Harvard University, and is Deputy Judge of the Permanent Court of International Justice.

I am sure you all agree with me that the Foreign Policy Association is fortunate that Dr. Redlich has been willing to come down from Cambridge to be with us today.

DR. JOSEF REDLICH

*M*R. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: I am in possession of a very great legacy, a great inheritance, which Professor Laski left me; and I am very much embarrassed because I have not had sufficient time to inquire into all these properties which he has delivered into my hands. I have to consider his picture of European life, with all its passing very quickly, and as the time will not be sufficient to discuss the many most variable, most interesting points of view which my young, old friend, Laski, has kindly extended to me, let me begin with what he said about British parliamentary institutions.

Of course, we all know the situation which he eloquently sketched before you. There is this present parliamentary government which just has not a majority, and therefore, the Labor party suffers from the fact that it can't make use of that wonderful machinery of British parliamentary government, the admiration of which, I think, Mr. Laski shares fully with me.

This most curious and most elaborate instrument called British parliamentary government is now in a period which you might call a period of transition, and therefore, a certain uneasiness, growing from month to month, reigns in all classes of British society, and particularly in that part of the British people which is represented by the Labor party. But is it fair to take this experience of not yet two years as the basis for a more or less hopeless attitude toward institutions, like the classic British parliamentary government?

I understand fully the reasons for an almost despairing feeling in the ranks of the Labor party of Great Britain. Yet I would ask them to remember the four hundred year old history of the modern British parliamentary institution and I think we should wait with our judgment until after the end of the present critical period of a cabinet representative of but a minority in the House of Commons. After all, we are all hereditarily governed by majorities, and there is yet no parliamentary majority at present in Great Britain of Englishmen and Scotchmen who believe with Mr. Laski that the one great problem to be solved now is the creation of equality in the British people.

I still doubt that equality, as it is understood so often, is really the goal for which we have to strive. We still live in the atmosphere of democracy; and we will wait until democracy will come to the persuasion, to the conviction that society ruled by democracy must be transformed into the society of equality. This has not yet taken place in the world anywhere; it is, as it were, said to be attempted in Russia but the stage of experiment is not yet closed there. Not anywhere in European nations do you find a society moved by the political fervor which would make it possible to reach equality. Socialism is based on that ideal, but perhaps I might recall

in this case what a witty, long dead Austrian Prime Minister once said, "Ideals are those wonderful things which you can never really attain." Therefore, legislation and government should have ideals, but they should know they can't obtain them fully.

We have one country in the world now which has proclaimed equality, and that is Russia. But where is there the equality of free life and free labor? There is indeed a dictatorship supported by a very small minority. This will never be a goal to which European nations, central European and western nations, will tend. This is my firm conviction. I wouldn't wish to live to see the day when that is no more the case.

England has developed democracy in the nineteenth century, but not without serious fights. I think my dear friend Laski underrates the gulf which existed between the eighteenth century Toryism, the Gladstonian and John Bright's Liberalism. Theirs were real fights, and ruling men suffered when they had to abdicate—men like Lord Palmerston for example—but those who were the "die-hards" at that time suffered much more, felt the defeat and felt the abdication which came step by step. And this is England's glory; abdications of classes and of institutions in England have never been the product of revolutions and of a sudden collapse of the historic classes ruling the nation. They have been made by a piecemeal process, peacefully, step by step.

The democratic Parliament which was finally achieved, the democratic House of Commons which was realized in the course of the World War, is the product of a history of more than a hundred years. You must go back to the eighteenth century radicals to see how long a way England had to go, in order to become really democratic. When I was in England, just the day when the famous Zinovieff letter came up, I had the pleasure of sitting together with several parliamentary members of the Labor party who I can boast are old friends of mine, and whom I found rather oppressed by the result of the polling and when I addressed to them the question, "If anyone would have told you just twenty years ago that there would be a Labor cabinet in the year 1923, and after eleven months (this Labor cabinet being a minority cabinet) you would be defeated by a parliamentary trick, or in any casual event, would you have at that time thought you would be so much depressed as you are now? I think in five years there will be another Labor cabinet." Well, it came just in time. It still was a minority cabinet.

There is in my opinion a considerable progress realized by those two governments of Ramsay MacDonald's and in many ways for the better. From my point of view, England is now accustomed to Labor government—it doesn't matter that they were just minority governments, or that they couldn't suddenly conceive a socialist policy of such efficiency as to come nearer to what I would call here the realization of equality, or that they

could not immediately make good the terrible crisis that meanwhile had come upon industrial and commercial life of England.

I am sorry so often now to be told, that England has lost her supremacy in industry and trade. I don't know whether this is really true. I heard so many years before the war that Germany was ousting England from her economic supremacy. At present, certain people in Germany complain that England has come ahead again in so many branches of industry. I am convinced that England very well knew long before the present world crisis in economic life, that the paramountcy of British industry couldn't last eternally; for nothing in this world can last eternally.

The great advantages which England possessed before other nations in Europe in developing modern industry, these great advantages have become lessened in their efficiency, and England has now to fight a hard fight indeed in its competition with the United States, and once more with Germany; but I don't think that there is any reason for accepting a kind of fate which will ever force England to consider herself in a secondary place in the world of business and finance.

No, ladies and gentlemen, I see no reason for despair, and certainly not for that particular form of despair which I perhaps erroneously read from the fears of my friend, Laski. He impressed me so strongly (Mr. Laski) that he obliged me to take up matters different from those I first intended to discuss; for I wanted to talk to you before all not about the essence and the hopefulness of British parliamentary government; for I wanted to speak on dictatorships in Europe.

I am sure my dear colleague knows better than I do all the literature where he would find so many proofs from the history of the last hundred and twenty years, passages in writings, in diaries, in books, in letters of English statesmen giving expression to mourning, to sadness because of the decay of parliamentary life and institutions. I shall only give you one name. In the fifties of the nineteenth century Thomas Carlyle became the great preacher of all those ideas in England connected with belittling English parliamentarism. Every generation in England found that the former political generation had been much better. As far as I know all the old masters and teachers in parliamentary work already were convinced that generally for mankind the golden age always lies in the past. So it also was with the golden age of the British Parliament!

When a class suffered defeat, like the British landed estate in the first half of the nineteenth century, they believed Parliament was hopelessly declining. There came new, often raw men, into Parliament, robust men, rude fellows, no more talking in that polished way of Eton and Oxford, incomparably culturally lower than those fine last generations of the Whigs and the Tories. Again, when the miners and other workmen entered the

sacred hall of the Commons during the twentieth century in increasing numbers the middle class and their parliamentary leaders began to lament of the decay of Parliament and its noble traditions.

Thus I should like to finish the first part of my address—the Laski part—with the hearty request: let us not despair of good old England and Scotland. I never forget Scotland. With a good many Scotchmen sitting in Westminster I don't believe much nonsense will be made, also not as far as the dream of equality is concerned. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald fortunately is a Scotchman and there are several leading Scotchmen in the Labor party. You certainly understand why I am an optimist for the future of British parliamentary government and its traditions!

Now let me go to the other side: Continental Europe. We have been brought up politically one hundred years by learning from England. We learned British parliamentary institutions first from the intermediate French teacher. The French ideas on parliamentary institutions and their principles have become paramount for all Europe, at least, for central Europe and southern Europe. When that process had reached a certain saturation in the minds of the people of Germany, France, Italy, it became not dictatorship, but revolution, the revolutions of 1848; and the middle class ideal of government, the doctrine of liberalism and constitutionalism became for a short time the master of Germany, of Austria-Hungary, and Italy. Then followed a very curious period in the history of Europe: namely, the historic fact that the idea of one-man rule regained great prestige, and this was achieved by one man, by Bismarck. Germany, absolutely in the tenets of liberal ideas about '48 in the middle classes and also in the masses beneath the bourgeoisie, became, in the course of not quite twenty years, the admirer of the strong man and one-man rule, of course, in the historic form of monarchy. The monarchic idea was not yet at an end in Europe: Bismarck demonstrated and proved that by his life's work.

There was of course the Prussian monarchy; and in general the German monarchic idea regained unexpected strength by the success which Prussia won in Europe, under Bismarck's leadership, first, in foreign policy, and secondly, by the achievements of the inner administration in united Germany, carried on by a bureaucracy of high moral and intellectual qualities, and administration by experts. No responsible government was tolerated by Bismarck and his successors in office. It was a government by officials, officers, and appointed experts. The end of this period we all have lived through. It was the World War. This historical reminiscence was necessary in order, I think, to judge our present age and its conflicting tendencies.

We see now, in the decade after the great war that monarchy in Continental Europe has been abolished most probably forever. There are

several gentlemen who are addressed and publicly received like kings, and ladies who are received as queens, who particularly in this country, in America, enjoy a full measure of celebrity in their position; but it is a fact that by the fall of the German monarchy as an institution, this institution has been destroyed—monarchy in the old historic sense as one-man rule. Historically considered monarchy has been a Germanic invention, if I may say so—essentially after the revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it always has been reinvigorated by the Teutonic influence.

Democracy was not made just safe by the Peace Treaty of Paris, but it has been spread all over Europe. Democracy has been more or less speedily transformed into a *nationalist* dictatorship in many countries, for this is the common feature of them all. We have a dictatorship in Italy; we have a dictatorship in Turkey. Everywhere nationalism has been the driving force behind it.

Ladies and gentlemen, what are these dictatorships? They are curiously not found only with the so-called vanquished nations; on the contrary they are found neither in Germany, nor in Austria. They are found partly in the victorious countries, and in the countries of their allies, like Poland. What is the real dynamic force behind this dictatorship? Is it that tendency towards equality, for which my friend, Laski, spoke so eloquently and so seriously? Is it the great force of our age, Socialism? No; it is the nationalist spirit that has produced the war, that has made the war finally victorious for the allies, that stood behind the whole mass of dissatisfied national feeling existing in Europe at the beginning of the war. Altogether these dictatorships are the products of the war; and this is particularly true also of Italy, where it was an immediate consequence of the war, in so far as its result hadn't accorded them the nationalistic pride and prestige demanded by the leading classes of Italy. Therefore, they turned against the first attempt to make social progress a little more real than it was before that in Italy, and they turned the government into a nationalist and class dictatorship at the same time.

In Poland things are quite different. In Poland there is a problem which at present has not its like in the world; a nation divided 160 years ago into three parts, which lived separately under foreign rule, has now to be united. And what is the real reason of the existence of independent Poland? It is merely the nationalist idea and the occasional fact that there is a man whose personality represents a dynamic force, just as if he were created by Providence for the modern Polish mind, for the dictatorship of Pilsudski is perhaps more personal than even the dictatorship of Mussolini in Italy.

In Hungary the dictatorship was the necessary consequence of the fact that the Magyars, after a thousand years of being the masters over eight other nations, certainly were deprived of all their former citizens, or let

me say, partners, of different races who have never been real partners of the Hungarian Kingdom. So Magyarism, without formally calling it a dictatorship, created a nationalist dictatorship.

Now let us proceed to Germany. Ladies and gentlemen, Germany in the last thousand years always has played one of the dominant rôles in European history, either passively or actively. Germany has never been a country in which modern parliamentary institutions have been admired by the German masses. First, they didn't know them when German liberalism introduced them in '48—there was no time left to become familiar with what the English nation had acquired by a history of centuries, they lacked full understanding of government by formal popular consent, by consent before all of the middle classes; but more and more these classes in England were transformed into large organizations through the nation, until you can say that now the British nation is, as a whole, organized for being represented in Parliament. But Germany didn't have that happy development. Since its unification in the nineteenth century, it was a country ruled by the domineering genius of Bismarck; and this period must absolutely be termed the period of the continuous sinking of liberalism and of the political self-government of the German people.

I am old enough to have lived through most of that process. I have seen this process as it went on. I have known the old generation that revered the liberal era of Germany in the nineteenth century, and I have seen my own contemporaries in universities growing fully into that neo-German spirit of high-handed, self-righteous monarchical rule by bureaucratic cabinets. It was not necessary that this neo-German spirit ended in its Wilhelman form and essence, but that it ended so is a fact. What connects the fifties, the period of reaction against liberalism with present time Germany is that for sixty years the German people have been taught by the most successful of German statesmen that the parliamentary institutions in Germany had to serve only as a kind of auxiliary for the chancellor, for the ministers, for the experts. Germany's political constitution was that of a government of experts under royal guidance, and seemed satisfactory because it formed a growing political leadership of those classes which developed German agriculture, industry and commerce, and made Germany the first continental economic power.

The prestige of Bismarck's was the solid basis of all this. He developed this idea practically by his government, theoretically by his speeches—you can find it all in his speeches—and it has been transferred from generation to generation. Democracy at last came into Germany as an emergency device, by means of which it was to be led henceforward by the victorious "democratic" world, into the Paradise of the political future.

Democracy is thus, for Germany, connected with that terrible feeling felt strongly by millions in Germany still—the terrible feeling of defeat not

only in the military sense, but also as becoming subject to the overwhelming power of all other nations united against Germany. Can you expect democracy to be popular in Germany with those classes that had heretofore consented to imperial government? And these classes are much larger than you perhaps assume. There is only one class that had hope, not in parliamentarism, but in democracy, and this was the German social democracy.

This social democracy, despised and put aside under William II, as you all know sufficiently, was what saved Germany from the danger of a terrible revolution in 1918. I would like in this great assembly of American citizens especially to name that man who personally did this great work, who was indeed a kind of democratic dictator. It was Fritz Ebert, the first President of the Republic. He cooperated with all parties. He was more of a German patriot than all those wonderful patriots marching around under William II with all their glittering weapons and orders and all their brilliant uniforms, because he felt so strongly about Germany as a true German that he was ready to sacrifice even his special social democratic ideas and his obligations to his party's creed in order to maintain the German nation and Republic as a whole; and so the revolutionary unrest of '18 became no revolution, but practically a skirmish of social democrats with communists or other type of radicals. But the bulk of the German working class stood behind Ebert and his democratic helper, one of the last remnants of the old German liberal spirit, Professor Preuss who drafted the first draft of the new German republican constitution.

Ladies and gentlemen, this shows you almost the same picture as the fate of the governments of Ramsay MacDonald. Ramsay MacDonald had to resign his socialist ideals when he took office because he had no majority, and Fritz Ebert and his party had to resign their socialistic schemes, when they founded the German Republic.

Ramsay MacDonald had to resign most of his Socialism because England is now pressed not by the endeavor for social equality of all classes in England, but by the question how the British Empire can be maintained. Ebert evidently had to resign his Marxism because Germany would have been exploded into particles if the German social democrats would have made Germany a second Soviet Republic of Europe.

I am far from being a social democrat, but there is nothing more outstanding, in my mind, in modern history, than the group of those social democratic leaders in Germany and in Great Britain who execute the will of the people in a kind of dictatorial position, but their dictatorship based on a compromise with the middle classes of the nation. They compromised with the Catholics, compromised with that historic middle class party, the liberal democrats, and so they produced in Germany an admirable constitution, a truly German constitution which was just the proof of the political wisdom of the leaders of this fundamentally democratic party of

the German people, of the industrial workmen and their intellectual friends and supporters at large.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, technical dictatorship means, before all, sooner or later, government by force. It means belief in force. Who in our day doesn't realize that force in politics beats that man who uses it and unfailingly that force turns against him? When you follow history you will find dictatorships, though not formally declared in the history of all great nations—it was dictatorship that Puritanism has been teaching England; it was a kind of moral dictatorship that finally made the first reform bill victorious, in 1832. What I told you of the social democratic party in Germany 1919 shows a dictatorship which all parties could accept, a dictatorship of self-moderation, of self-compromise with your political neighbors and even your adversaries in the hour of severest national emergency. One of the greatest blessings of the parliamentary institutions is that parliamentary government just because it is a party government means a rule by compromise. It is a method of governing by compromises; Mr. Balfour at one time said to me, when I once talked to him about the history of English parliamentary procedure, "After all, you are quite right. We have always compromised except, of course in the religious questions; and even there we could have compromised if we had been clever."

Compromise is not always possible. It is not possible where, as Mr. Laski says, party passion comes up. But parties as such cannot last, if they are passionate beyond reason. We have today more parties of passion than national parties, we have again a kind of religious parties, namely what I should like to call sectarian parties in modern politics.

As I speak in the metropolis of the United States, let me ask, ladies and gentlemen, is there not an element of dictatorship in our America? When the fathers built the constitution they had one great anxiety—safeguarding of freedom; no monarch, no ruler to be afraid of. They were afraid of tyranny—and they also feared the tyranny of majorities of the legislative assemblies. If you read letters of Jefferson and Adams and Madison you will find that always referred to. They knew that there must be a kind of dictatorial element in the constitution; so they elaborated that famous principle of separation of powers in the American manner. They made the president in legislation a dictator in so far as his dictatorship is not resisted by the stronger will of the elected representatives of the nation. Now, gentlemen, that is a dictatorial element which must be everywhere when a collection of men and women has to cooperate in politics or an administration.

There are probably several of the great business men of the United States sitting here now, and I am sure they will agree there is no great business organization that does not require from time to time a strong

dictatorial element; but it is not contained in law, in the rules, it is embodied in the personality of the leader.

So the end of it is that what democracy needs, before all, is a solution of the problem of leadership. The born leader, the leader who has proved that he is able to be a leader will always have a kind of dictatorial power in democracies that need leadership more than anything else and need from time to time that force which my friend, Laski, wishes for the solution of the great social and economic problems now standing before the people, in England and elsewhere.

I do not want to end my speech without saying: what is terrifying in Europe now is less the idea of dictatorship than the consequences of the natural endeavors of dictators to maintain themselves; and if international clashes of nationalist and economic interests are avoided I am convinced that we on the continent will still have to learn from English parliamentary institutions a good deal; and we will find I hope a way to make democracy really safe by profitable practice—by what democracy will achieve, as democracy has achieved so much in the nineteenth century in Europe.

THE CHAIRMAN: Now we come to the discussion period of today. We have only a minute or two more than twenty minutes. Questions may be addressed either in writing or from the floor to either Professor Redlich or Mr. Laski. I suggest that at least the first ones be addressed to Mr. Laski, because he has had a period of rest since his initial presentation. Please remember, today particularly, since we have so little time, that your questions would be more welcome than your speech.

Where is the first question? Hasn't someone an embarrassing question for Mr. Laski?

QUESTION: *Mr. Laski said that one of the difficulties of the parliamentary government was the burdening of Parliament by a multiplicity of affairs. Why is not the solution the establishment of local Parliaments to handle local affairs, leaving the imperial affairs to the central Parliament?*

THE CHAIRMAN: I would just like to say this, as a personal party of Scotch descent, one wonders what would happen to the central Parliament unless there remained that very large percentage of Scottish leadership. Still, that is an improper comment; so I ask Mr. Laski to answer the question.

MR. LASKI: May I begin by answering Mr. McDonald's remark? The only conquest of England that has ever taken place followed upon the

union with Scotland in 1707. If Englishmen, even were allowed subsequent to the withdrawal of Scotland, to manage their own affairs, enormous improvements might easily have resulted.

But, so far as the actual question is concerned, a speakers' committee was appointed on this class devolution in 1920; it produced a report in 1922. Mr. J. S. Henderson and I, analyzing that, showed that the total saving to Parliament would be eight per cent of parliamentary time; and from the angle of seriously groping with the whole problem that confronts us, the contribution that devolution would make is infinitesimal in character.

THE CHAIRMAN: That was a very good answer and a very good question. Now, may we have another one, again addressed to Mr. Laski, if you will?

QUESTION: *I would like to ask a question of the Chair. Why is it that the dictatorship point of view was not represented by a speaker this afternoon?*

THE CHAIRMAN: The question is really out of order, but I will try to find the answer. Well, I suppose the answer is twofold. First, that it is extremely difficult to find anyone, except a communist, who will in a downright fashion, defend dictatorship *per se*; and second, if there is such a person, we didn't find him.

QUESTION: *Why is parliamentary government a failure because it fails to secure the will of what, by the election returns, are only a minority in Great Britain?*

MR. LASKI: Well, that isn't what I said. If I am going to be quoted I really must be quoted correctly. What I said, Mr. Chairman, was that in the light of the way in which Parliament functioned and the fashion in which Parliament is built, upon a volume of fundamental agreements between two or three parties to the parliamentary equation, when that fundamental agreement does not exist, is it likely that by the technique of discussion a solution satisfactory to both can be arrived at? That Parliament so far granted the fact that the parties to the equation were of a broadly identical class, with broadly identical interests, and disposed to agree as reasonable human beings. It is the next generation and not the past generation with which I am fundamentally concerned.

QUESTION: *I would ask Mr. Laski whether the Mosley revolt indicates an increase in the parties in England, and therefore a tendency to break down the parliamentary system?*

MR. LASKI: Sir Oswald Mosley was the chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in Mr. MacDonald's government, until a little less than a year ago. He resigned, on the ground that the Labor government was not showing a sufficient urgency and energy in its effort to solve the unemployment question.

He then progressed rather rapidly to a combination of extreme socialism on the one hand and extreme conservatism on the other. He was a kind of intellectual get-rich-quick, and as a consequence of being that and (trying to keep within the scope of the law of slander) and as a consequence of that eagerness, he proposed a plan, parts of which were interesting economically, parts of which could only be described as fatuous; and a plan on the political side, parts of which were not without interest, but the majority of which showed a great capacity of rhetoric, but a complete inability to understand the business of thought; and whereas his original manifestoes were supported by a considerable section of the Labor party, and as his manifestoes increased in volume and intensity there was a diminishing body of support on their behalf. Whereas I think the first manifesto was supported by 37 members of the Labor party, the last manifesto was supported by, I think 5.

I venture the prediction that Sir Oswald Mosley will rapidly progress to his natural home among the big business men who support the Conservative party, and that his impact upon the Labor party and the consequent fractionalization of the House of Commons will, in the next year or two years, amount to precisely nothing.

QUESTION: *I should like to ask Dr. Redlich whether he regards the Nationalist issue as a fundamental issue or one that is advanced by the present ruling classes to obscure the issue of equality?*

PROFESSOR REDLICH: I think this question can be answered in the affirmative in many cases. Political problems are never so clear-cut that one can say it is this or that alone which produces this or that effect. There is no doubt that in Italy the upper classes—that means before all, industry and finance—were very strong in supporting Mussolini's ideas and dominance to exaggerate nationalism created by the war in Italy.

There is no doubt that in Poland, so-called conservative parties also are now the main supporters of Pilsudski, whereas the working class, the social democratic party in Poland, feel that this nationalism is, of course, pointed against them.

In Germany, of course, there is also an example. Perhaps I may point to national-socialist movement in Germany. I don't believe that that is a nationalist outburst only. German national feeling has a very curious history. The German national feeling has a history of more than a hun-

dred years, and in German politics it has a long spiritual development. It goes back to the Napoleonic wars, and back to the romantic period of German philosophy and literature. It is now rising as a political force mainly because of the misery of the German middle classes. The workmen in Germany, in spite of the hard pressure of the economic crisis, is better off than many of the middle class society; and this national socialism, as it calls itself, or nationalism, is rising as a product of the influences created from the war, and from war literature, and also as a protest against communism.

Communism comes to Germany from Russia and hits very strongly in the German feelings. All German traditions are strictly opposed to the ideas which Lenin and Lenin's disciples propagated. Yet there is, as you all know, quite a strong communist party in Germany, too; but these men for a great part come from those trade unions and those organizations of workmen that are dissatisfied with just that policy of compromise which Ebert and the leaders of the old Social Democratic party set in movement ten years ago.

National socialists take their support mostly from universities, from the best trained and best educated centers of Germany, representing a good deal of old German feelings connected partly with the whole sphere of thinking and emotional German life, shaped by the romanticists and their modern Epigoni and followers.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think you all appreciated Dr. Redlich's reference to the German nationalists. We have time for only a few more questions—perhaps two or three. I should think the last answer which Mr. Laski gave would provoke someone to ask him something else.

I have just been handed a written question. While I am trying to decipher it, has someone an oral question?

QUESTION: *I would like to ask what is wrong with the statement made by Sir Henry Sumner Maine in his popular government, in defense of despotism, where he stated that after all, the despotic government under favorable conditions would be the most ideal form of government? A ruler who is all powerful as well as all wise would know what is best to do under any particular circumstances and would be able to carry out those resolutions despite all opposition.*

THE CHAIRMAN: What is the question, sir?

QUESTION: *I want to know what is wrong with that statement. In justice to Maine I would like to add one sentence more. He says the only trouble is we haven't found just the man yet, and if we did, we would have some difficulty finding a successor equally endowed.*

MR. LASKI: Well, there are two answers. The first is that all its errors, which are manifold, will be found in an essay by John Morley, in which he finished Sir Henry Maine as a student of government for good and all. And the other answer is to be found in the fact that every despotism that has come into existence has at some point in its development confused its private good with the public welfare, and has fallen as a consequence.

QUESTION: *Professor Laski, directly or indirectly, expressed the belief that socialism is desirable. I would like to ask him whether such an attitude or a statement is rather unscientific, since the real question that the humanity of a civilized country will be called upon to solve is not whether socialism is desirable or undesirable, but to what extent socialism is desirable, and to what extent it should be retained?*

MR. LASKI: The gentleman wants to know whether it was unscientific of me to say that socialism is the inevitable development of western Europe in the coming years, without producing a bill of particulars. The answer is it is perfectly scientific to say that; and you will find the bill of particulars in a 670-page book of mine called "The Grammar of Politics," but I couldn't possibly reproduce the substance of those pages in the half hour at my disposal.

THE CHAIRMAN: Here is a question. It was telephoned in, and I am going to try to read it. *Professor Laski asserts the desirable aim of rational political action is economic equality. This is very different from the equality which democracy eradicates. How would Professor Laski justify the desire for economic equality?*

MR. LASKI: In any society, what people are trying to do is to satisfy the demands of their personality—physical demands, spiritual demands, intellectual demands. They find in the operation of that society the incidence of the working of the state is tilted to the advantage of those who are annexed to a larger amount of property instead of being annexed to a smaller amount of property. The character of the state takes on the character of those who possess its economic power. Therefore, the more broadly equal the economic demand, which is the more broadly the function, or the product of economic equality, the more likely are demands to be equally weighed. As a consequence, in order that A and B and C, with little property, may be equally considered with X and Y and Z, with great property, the mitigation of the differences in the property that they own is essential, in order that the state may realize the satisfaction of the general demand they represent.

THE CHAIRMAN: I am very sorry that there is no more opportunity to listen to answers from Professor Redlich or from Professor Laski; but I merely must close the meeting and extend on your behalf, our very great thanks to them both.

Reading Suggestions

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